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SUBJECT: BAMYAN: HAZARA POLITICS: VIEW FROM THE CENTRAL HIGHLANDS

REF: A) Kabul 1008

B) Kabul 1460

Summary

1. (SBU) Bamyán is a bellwether for political attitudes of members of the Hazara ethnic group, and it offers insights to how various parties are seeking to engage the Hazara population. Hezb-e-Wahdat Islami and the Hezb-e-Wahdat Islami-e-Mardum remain the most active and influential parties in the Hazarajat; Haji Mohammad Mohaqqueq and the Mardum party have gained momentum in recent months. The Insejomi Milli party under Sadiq Mudabir is new to the field but appears to be a serious contender for influence. Meanwhile, the majority of Tajiks in the province are loyal to Jamiat-e Islami or Hezb-e Islami.

The Demographics

2. (U) Though more Hazaras live outside Bamyán province than inside, it remains the political touchstone and heartland for the Hazara community. Hazaras view development in Bamyán as symbolic of central government attention to the Hazara minority. Should anti-government elements target Hazaras, many would return to Bamyán and rely on it as a strong hold. Thus, Bamyán remains a battleground for the hearts, minds, and votes of Hazara throughout Afghanistan.

3. (SBU) Population data is difficult to obtain because Afghanistan lacks updated census data, large numbers of Hazaras have returned from Pakistan and Iran, and many have migrated within Afghanistan. Rough estimates portray the following distribution: 1.2 million in Kabul, 750,000 in Samangan and Balkh, 400,000 in Bamyán, 350,000 in Ghor and Dai Kundai, 270,000 in Ghazni, 230,000 in Wardak, 190,000 in Herat, and 100,000 in Sari Pul.

The Primary Parties: A Tale of Two Hezb-i-Wahdats

4. (SBU) Two branches of Hezb-e Wahdat Islami have the most influence among Hazaras. The first branch, Hezb-e-Wahdat Islami is led by Second Vice-President Mohammad Karim Khalili, who inherited leadership from Hazara leader and unifier Abdul Ali Mazari. Under Khalili's leadership the party still commands reach and resources. However, the stature of Khalili and his party is diminishing as the perception that Khalili has failed to support the Hazara people during his vice-presidential tenure increases. Hazaras have seized on Khalili's long absence from the province and hands-off reputation to perpetuate this impression. Despite its decline, the party's staunch supporters hold key leadership positions, including Deputy Governor Fahimi, current head of the Provincial Council Poya, and

the Deputy Chief of Police. Their base of power lies in Bamyan and Yakawlang Districts.

15. (SBU) Kabul MP and former presidential candidate Haji Mohammad Mohaqqueq leads the Hezb-e Wahdhat Islami-e-Mardum party, which commands the majority of Hazara support. Despite a 2005 setback when Mohaqqueq aligned himself with Abd al-Rabb al-Rasul Sayyaf, a figure widely despised by Hazara, in an ill-fated deal to elect Sayyaf lower house Speaker in exchange for Sayyaf's support of Mohaqqueq's run for First Deputy Speaker, the party has steadily regained popularity. Mohaqqueq actively complains about the lack of attention, development, and equality for Hazaras. He travels to the province regularly and recently donated a large statue of Mazari in the central round-about, hinting he may be a better inheritor of Mazari's legacy. In Kabul, meanwhile, Mohaqqueq's rhetoric has turned increasingly towards a Hazara nationalist line, which appears to be gaining political traction.

16. (SBU) At his provincial party headquarters Mohaqqueq is taking a populist approach, sponsoring sports events like a widely-attended, full-contact karate tournament, and receiving development requests in order to "expedite" them to the government. The Mardum branch of Hezb-i-Wahdat has support from around 70 percent of the Hazara population. Many of the better educated and more connected Hazara leaders, however, remain suspicious of Mohaqqueq's past human rights violations and unsavory political alliances. The party remains active in central Bamyan and maintains major power bases in the populous southern districts of Panjab and Waras. The party's message on social justice and equality for Hazaras has lately gained more credence. The perception of central government inaction on Kuchi (Pashtun nomads) migration into Hazarajat and the perception

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that development is only happening in Pashtun areas continue to fuel discontent.

The New Entrants and the other Bamyan

17. (SBU) The Insejomi Milli party, a relative newcomer to the Hazara political scene, has surprised many with its popularity. In mid-June, the party opened its new centrally located headquarters in Bamyan. Sadiq Mudabir, Deputy to Farooq Wardak, Palace Head of Parliamentary Affairs, leads the party. Minister Wardak and Mudabir also worked together when Wardak headed the Joint Electoral Management Body. In some ways, Isejomi Milli is a splinter of the Hizb-e Harakat Islami-e Mardum-e Afghanistan, which splintered from the Harakat-e Islami party. Mudabir's influence in the current administration, coupled with his knowledge of the elections process, could make his new party a formidable political force. Insejomi Milli is appealing to intellectuals, university students and youth. It bills itself as one of the President's parties and has the support of the Minister of Mines. Some recent appointments, including the Provincial Executive Officer, seem to indicate the party is already leveraging a spoils system to reward supporters.

18. (SBU) While Bamyan is known as the Hazara homeland, the northeast districts of Bamyan are recent additions to the province, and the majority ethnic group is the Tajiks, not the Hazaras. The Tajiks in these districts divide their allegiance between Jamiat-i-Islami and Hezb-i Islami.

19. (SBU) Comment: Governor Sorabi remains staunchly apolitical, refusing to align herself with any party. Recalling her attendance of an initial Insejomi Milli event in Kabul, she said she was uncomfortable with the strong evidence of conservative Pashtun influence at the event. As elections approach, however, more and more people seem to be clamoring for the governorship. The position may become a mechanism for Karzai to pull Hazaras into his political orbit. Governor Sorabi says she is open to suitable alternatives but insists any move happen on her terms.

110. (SBU) Most senior figures in Bamyan appear to accept the reality of a Pashtun President. They even say they prefer a Pashtun over a Tajik candidate, revealing a lingering distrust of Tajik intentions and previous broken alliances.

